

Who Are The Pharisees Today?

By Doug Perry, www.FellowshipOfTheMartyrs.com

You know the Seven Woes that Jesus calls down on the Pharisees in Matthew 23? It's clear he doesn't think much of them as a group. They were showy and extravagant, they loved the places of honor and the feeling that they knew more than anyone else, they would work hard to make a new convert and then corrupt them into their own twisted image, they put their faith in the material rather than the spiritual, they gave money instead of giving of their mercy and time and faithfulness, they were full of greed and self-indulgence, they looked shiny and new on the outside but were hollow on the inside.

Did you ever know someone like that? Have you seen religious leaders act that way? I'm sure we all have someone that we could point to and say meets at least some of the characteristics Jesus ascribed to the Pharisees. Have you known people like the Rich Young Ruler that loved God but couldn't take that final step of obedience?

Through my own experiences growing up overseas as a missionary kid and as we continue to grow our new job creation and missions organization, www.AcrossCountries.com we've had a great opportunity to get a little glimpse of how Christians in America are viewed from the outside.

A really terrible thought has been gnawing at me lately. In our local circle of influence we can usually point to someone that we can describe as a "Pharisee." But if you got the Christians from all over the world in one bunch and asked them to point out who was most like the Pharisees as Jesus described them – WE'RE the ones at whom they would all be pointing!

Only six percent of the Christians in the world live in North America, yet 95 percent of available Christian resources are spent here. Only eight percent of the world speaks English, yet more than 90 percent of all Christian ministry (spoken, radio, television, print) is conducted in English. Half of the world has never seen even a single page of the Bible! When we send missionaries over there and convert someone, the first thing we do is impose our denominational distinctives and enmesh them in our theological squabbles over issues that aren't central to the true faith.

There are Christian Brothers and Sisters starving to death and still being faithful, finding a way to tithe even in poverty. Their commitment and joy in the Lord is awesome and should shame all of us. They go and preach in the most dangerous places, knowing they could be killed (and frequently are) - while we are unwilling to talk to our neighbors for fear of looking like a "Jesus freak."

Previously I've mentioned that the United States gross domestic product (GDP) is about \$10 Trillion per year. Regular church-going Christians control as much as \$3 Trillion per year of that through our personal income (roughly equivalent to the ENTIRE annual spending of the U.S. Government). We control many, MANY times that when you calculate the value of our stocks, savings, real estate, life insurance, businesses and other assets. What are we accomplishing with it? From the perspective of Christians in other countries, we're just gorging ourselves while others stand and wait to be fed – both physically and spiritually.

I can't find any Biblical justification for some Christians having assets worth tens of trillions of dollars while other Christians (on an income of \$1 or \$2 per day) survive and build churches and minister to others around them. In fact, it seems to me there are some very specific scriptures to which we should probably pay more attention. For example:

1 Timothy 6:17-19; "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life."

Or maybe Mark 10:23; "Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" (See also: 1 Timothy 6:8-10, Luke 16, Mark 12:41-44)

You think you're not rich? Compared to what? Compared to your boss or the guy in that giant house down the street or someone on TV? You think Jesus is talking about someone else? I've got news for you, in today's world, He is talking about YOU – and me. And if He's talking about churches, it's OUR churches that will have the hardest time at the final Judgement, not those in India or China or Ethiopia. The VAST percentage of all Christian resources are in the Western countries. In our bank accounts and those of our churches. BILLIONS live on less than \$2 per day.

I'm not telling you what to do with your wealth. I just ask that you will pray and listen to God and ask him to guide you. If you decide you want to make a commitment to help, feel free to contact us or at least read more about what is happening out there. We also recommend Gospel for Asia (www.gfa.org) as a great way to find out more and get connected.

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